



# THE ARMY OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

by

BALWANT SINGH M.A.



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## SOME OPINIONS ABOUT THIS BOOK

I have read with interest "The Sikh Soldier" by Sardar Balwant Singh. I always read with interest whatever comes from his pen, for he has insight, expression and simplicity of style that attracts me.

My childhood passed in a home where old traditions still prevailed. After the morning and evening recital, my father and his friends prayed for a death at the saddle (Hannitai) and stories of valiant deeds were told, which kindled hidden fires of heroism.

To be a soldier was a dream of every youth, to die in a battle field the highest ambition. It is impossible to convey the impression of that old world environment, when Dhadies sang of the old wars and the heart of youth throbbed with selfless devotion. To defend the humble and the weak, to make the honour of the Khalsa resplendent, and to stand erect amongst the nations of the world, and to give away life, so that others may live in peace, invests soldiering with a splendour which must claim homage of humanity.

My grandfather, who was present at Chelianwalla and later on joined the British army rising to the Command of a regiment and received many decorations, once went to see a high officer who tauntingly asked, "You seem to have won many medals now but where were you during the Sikh war." My grandfather immediately retorted, "Where were you at Chelianwalla."

"We were commanded to retire" answered he. ...  
 had no one to command us" replied my grandfather.

The position does not seem to have changed very much even now. The Sikh soldier is ready to serve and to sacrifice but there is no one to give him the right command.

I pray that we may keep the ideal to be soldiers of God untarnished. We must learn to be without fear and without hate, placing our reliance on the word of our Gurus, on pure steel, and on our strong arm. We must make the Khalsa a centre of purity, brotherliness, unity and strength. We should be faithful soldiers of God, be ready to defend all good causes. We must try to show in our lives that to us Paja and Nimaz are the same, that creation belongs to the Creator and in serving His creation we serve Him.

JOGENDRA SINGH.

## THE SIKH SOLDIER

Writing about the Sikh soldier, his dress and equipment in the current issue of the *Khalsa Review*, S Balwant Singh quotes many interesting passages from Osborne, Baron Hugel and Sir Lepel Griffin who give illuminating accounts of the dresses worn by the Sikh bodyguard, infantry and jagirdari contingents in the period preceding Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule.

The common trooper was clad in *pagri* or *turban*, and *kurta* or shirt with open sleeves, and a pair of short drawers with tight fitting slippers. Each horseman provided himself with two blankets, one for himself and the other for his horse. They were armed, each with a spear, a matchlock and a scimitar. Speaking of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's infantry, Osborne in his "Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh" says :

They are a fine-looking body of men dressed in white jackets and trousers, with black belts and pouches, and wear the yellow Sikh *turban*." I never saw so straight or beautiful a line with any troops. They were all dressed in white with black cross-belts and either a red or yellow Sikh *turban*, armed with muskets and bayonets of excellent manufacture from Ranjit's foundry at Lahore.

There is now a museum within the Lahore fort wherein jackets, bayonets, swords, shields, lances, breast-plates, back-plates, steel-armour, steel-helmets,

shells, etc , used by the army of the Maharaja have been carefully preserved.

Thus, no nation which claims to be the proud possessor of an empire can retain the higher qualities of humanity. The cruelty and habitual tyranny of the slave-owning class warps alike their judgment and humanity.

And then the owners of empires are constantly haunted by a perpetual sense of insecurity.

The mightiest empire in the world never considered itself safe. An empire is an unlawful possession and property unlawfully obtained can never be peacefully enjoyed. No nation has any lawful right to any territory other than its own ; an empire is won either by force or trickery or treachery, or a combination of all these methods. There is a constant apprehension of losing what is not rightfully acquired.-

The dazzling splendour of empires only increases the appetite for more splendour. There is no end to their greed and covetousness.

A kingdom or a republic is usually a self-contained and self-reliant State supplying its own needs and independent of help from outside. An empire, on the other hand, is of the nature of a parasite, a vampire or a leech. Its main feature is extravagant magnificence. It has no use for economy of any kind and revels in extravagant expenditure and waste. Every source of revenue is exploited to the utmost and no attempt is ever made to discourage reckless expenditure. No qualms of conscience or any sense of morality or feelings

of decency are permitted to stand in the way of raising the wind. Not only are subject nations cruelly over-taxed, an endless ingenuity being exercised in discovering fresh sources of taxation, but no scruples whatsoever are felt in deriving all kinds of income from other countries.

Finally, just as it is a common failing of all men that they cannot see themselves as others see them, so is it true of an imperial race blinded by pride and utterly incapable of realizing its defects.

It has a highly exaggerated notion of its greatness and importance; intoxicated with the possession of unlimited authority over the nations subject to its sway; it forgets that no nation can have a long lease of life unless it is self-reliant and capable of maintaining itself without extraneous help. A nation which owns an empire becomes dependent for its very existence upon its subject nations. It cultivates habits of extravagance and luxury for which it needs all the money that can be raised from every part of the empire and from every source of revenue. The moral sense becomes blunted by indulgence, the parasitic habit grows till it becomes second nature, the virility which is the original secret of dominion and empire is sapped by pleasure and luxury, and the final result is the rapid emasculation and submergence of an imperial race."

*The Indian Review*  
September, 1932.



*Jodh Singh M.A.*

I have gone through the manuscript, the 'Sikh Soldier' by S. Balwant Singh, M.A., B.T. The writer has tried to give in a short compass how soldierly qualities developed in the Sikhs, the circumstances that brought about their change and the stern discipline of Maharaja Ranjit Singh that enhanced the value of those qualities. The opinions of several foreign observers and generals of repute will be read with a feeling of pride by all the Sikhs.

*Gulmarg*  
*Hw No. 219A.*

*R.S.D. College Ferozepur City*

*Dated 22-11-1938*

My Dear Sardar Sahib,

I have gone through the pages of your manuscript book and I can assure you that I have profitted very much. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's incidents of his life have impressed me most. You have tried to prove that reliance on their Guru, fighting for a cause and temperate and disciplined character made the Sikh Soldier a wonder of the world. You have succeeded in your attempt. Kindly publish it in the form of a printed book. Your community ought to publish it. It shall help Sikhs much. It shall inspire all Guru worshippers.

I would just humbly submit that heroic instances of individual Sikhs should be given in detail. Their sordid acts should be expunged.

*Yours sincerely*

P. V. Kunal

Principal

TEJA SINGH M.A.  
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

KHALSA COLLEGE,  
AMRITSAR.

*Dated 20-11-1932*

Dear Brother,

Thank you for your kind letter of the 16th instant. I have been reading your articles on 'Sikh Soldier' with great admiration. They show a great insight into the making of Sikh character, and will prove a real and substantial contribution to Sikh history. I should like to see them in book form, with an introduction from some influential man of letters, like Mr. Garrett or Mr. Bruce. It shouldn't be difficult to secure their help.

With best Wishes.

*Yours sincerely,*

TEJA SINGH

REGISTERED

D. O. No. 37

Head Quarter,  
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE,  
Rawalpindi District.

*Dated the 20th January 1945.*

Dear Sardar Sahib,

I return with thanks your typescript copy of "The Sikh Soldier", which I have run through with great interest. If, however, you should have this published I should like to obtain a copy. I am also wishing you the best of your luck in your new appointment, and am very grateful for all the work you did in Kahuta during your stay there. With best wishes.

*Yours sincerely,*

(Sd.).....

Sardar Balwant Singh,

c/o K halsa College for Women,  
*Abbott Road, Lahore.*

## FOREWORD

A Sikh is essentially a Soldier of God. The teachings of the Satgurus enjoin upon those who follow them and are called "His" the duty of serving humanity without the least consideration of colour or creed. They must realise His presence in *All* without distinction and in serving humanity at large, they should desire only to serve Him. It was with this spirit that the Sikhs came into being.

Their's not to reason why,

Their's but to do and die,

as true Sikhs carrying out the behests of Satguru.

This noble example of true service was set before us by the second Guru in his selfless, devoted service of Satguru Nanak Dev. Guru Angad as Bhai Lehna was fully and thoroughly tested by Guru Nanak before he became Guru Nanak himself. The tradition established by Guru Angad was fully carried out by Guru Amar Das and his successors. The final stage was reached when dauntless Sahibzadas of the tenth Guru laid down their lives in stopping the rising tide of tyranny of the then rulers. These noble traditions were kept up by the Sikhs of the Gurus and the rescue of the captive daughters of the Punjab from the invading hordes of Abhali forces and their restoration with all due respect and honour to their respective homes are deeds which for ever serve as

beacon lights to the coming generations. Alas, those noble sentiments of service are not so prominent these days but the heart of the Khalsa is true and the blue blood of the Sikh martyrs runs through his veins and without hesitation one can be sanguine that so long as Sikhs are true to the sacred and ennobling teachings of the Gurus there will not be wanting men who will keep the good name of a Sikh bright and untarnished. The author has dived deep into ancient history of the Panth and has depicted quite tersely the evolution of the peace-loving Sikhs of the Sitgurus into the full-fledged Soldiers of God that the Khalsa became in the time of Guru Gobind Singh. His very high personality acted like a magnet and drew to himself in bonds of love and service those who came to drink at his feet the Amrit which raised the fallen community of the Punjabis to the highest pinnacle of glory for performing deeds worthy of the brave and selfless soldiers of the Akal Purkh. Truly, the Khalsa was of God and victory was His. May we follow in the footsteps of our forefathers and may we be the true servants of humanity and thus serving His creation realize His ever-present presence amongst us and all around us and knit together humanity at large in bonds of true brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God!

These few well written small chapters, will I have reason to hope, be read by an appreciating public who will be able to follow the different stages of evolution of the Sikh community and the work it has done in

the past and for aught one knows, may be destined to do in the future. My only wish and prayer is that the Khalsa should always keep before its mind's eye the high traditions of the Panth and the noble ideals which were placed practically before him by our revered Satgurus for our guidance and future conduct in life. The Khalsa should tread faithfully and selflessly the path that the Satgurus chalked out for him and he is sure to reach the goal where the different jarring elements of society are sure to find a true haven of peace and prosperity for all.

*Amritsar*

*17th October, 1932.*

*Sunder Singh*

*Majithia*

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SIKH SOLDIER

#### Genesis and Growth of the Soldierly Spirit

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<sup>1</sup> "He" (The Sikh)" is unsurpassed as a soldier in the East" says Sir Lepel Griffin. The bravery of the Sikh soldiers has passed into a proverb; but we must not forget that the same people before the birth of Sikhism were content to see their wives and children being led away as so many cattle without daring to strike a blow in defence of them. Centuries of foreign misrule, 'despotism, and persecution had demoralised the national character, and <sup>2</sup> *Ishwaro Wa, Dillishwaro, Wa'* (The Lord of Delhi is as great as God) had long been a maxim of the terror-stricken Hindus. Guru Nanak (1469-1539) found his nation in this miserable plight. The uplift of the nation was a stupendous task. President Wilson rightly said that a nation is great, and only as great as its rank and file. An isolated Kabir, a solitary Nanak, or a world-famous Tagore, cannot connote a whole nation, just as the peak of Mt. Everest or of Kanchan Changa does not mean the whole range of the Himalayas. To elevate a whole nation, the masses must be roused and ennobled.

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(1) Griffin's *Ranjit Singh*. p. 36.

(2) *Transformation of Sikhism*. p. 101. footnote.

Others had preached the supposed virtues of asceticism, and at their bidding hundreds had left their hearths and homes, renounced the world, and with beggar's bowls in their hands, dwelt apart and away from the world. The best part of the manhood of the nation thus went into monastic life and India fell an easy prey to the foreign invader. Asceticism was one extreme, over-worldliness was the other. Guru Nanak (1469-1539) struck out a middle path. Live like a lotus flower or like a duck, in the water and yet above it, said he. Live in the world and yet be not of it.

'A householder, who does no evil,

Who is ever intent upon good,

Who continually exerciseth charity,

Such a householder is pure as the Ganges,

Nanak, Ram Kali Rag.

Man is a social being and he must needs form part of a corporate life, be it in a nation or society, "Social Contract" or no contract. Guru Nanak realised that the good of man could not possibly be realised in a merely internal state of the soul, which excludes the family, the state and the various social relations, into which men enter with each other." For mutual help and guidance, as also to serve as checks on each other, Guru Nanak laid particular stress on congregational worship (as distinct from domestic or solitary worship) and congregational singing of the word of the Gurm. Thus arose Sikh temples. To make Sikh temples as useful as possible, he designed them to serve as free dining halls (Langer was started by

Guru Nanak and enlarged by succeeding Gurus, more particularly by the third Guru.)

There was however, one thing, which Guru Nanak preached and practised with particular emphasis. In the opening verse of Japji (The morning prayer of the Sikhs) he calls God as 'Nirbhan' or fearless. God is fearless, he said. To be godly, one must be fearless. 'Death is the privilege of brave men, provided they die for an approved cause' (Nanak—Vadlians). Guru Nanak's whole life was a living example of fearlessness. His long tours in and out of India, in an age when travelling abroad was almost tantamount to courting death, were an expression of this spirit of fearlessness ! And like Christ himself, he never thought of the morrow or worried about the seemingly untoward things that befell him. <sup>1</sup> Whenever Mardana, Guru Nanak's constant companion, felt troubled or distressed on account of some untoward happening, Guru Nanak would serenely say, 'Wait, Mardana for God's revelation of His purpose. Worry not—(Dekhi Mardanian Kartarde rang)'. Like his Gurus, a typical Sikh soldier would not think of the morrow. Guru Nanak's object was to make his people fearless, and fear of God is the only antidote against fear of men. Guru Nanak therefore, fervently preached the need of constantly realising the presence of God. He exhorted his disciples to live, move and have their being in God, to fear God and love fellow-men. None but God was to be feared. The succeeding Gurus constantly dwelt on this theme. 'He alone

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(1) Janam Sakhi of Baba Nanak.



fears who practises sin,' said the fourth Guru, (Sri Rag). "Be fearless and meditate on God" ("Nirbhai hoe bhajo Bhagwan,") said Fifth Guru. "That man may be reckoned as the wisest of men, who gives no cause of fear to others, and is himself without fear." said the ninth Guru. 'Banish all fear : was the keynote of the tenth Guru's teaching. And when once fear is banished, you get an ideal soldier, a hero, a person with the will to dare and the soul to die. Such a soldier is invincible.

Guru Nanak tried to free the people from the bondage of gods and godlings, and did a great deal to break the shackles of caste, by instituting a common Langar System and congregational worship. By adopting the vernacular of the country for religious purposes, he, in a way roused the national sentiment of the people.<sup>1</sup> It was strengthened by the community of thought and ideal, daily realised in the congregational singing of the same religious hymns. More, "After centuries of subjection, Nanak was the first among the Hindus to raise his voice against tyranny and subjection" (Transformation of Sikhism by Narang—p. 12) Guru Nanak raised the spirit of the people from the lowness and servility which had dominated and depressed it for centuries, and by this means he elevated the tone of national character. The so-called depressed classes who were looked down upon as the dregs of hu-

manity were transmuted into some thing rich and strange and rare. These people were full of intense religious fervour, with their minds greatly emancipated. They were without fear and without reproach. The disciples of Nanak were thus a devoted band of brothers (they called one another Bhai or brother) who were drawn closer and closer together by their daily congregational worship and by their community of ideals and common religious traditions. They were indeed, now fit to enter on the career of national progress to which Nanak's successors subsequently led them. We might therefore, say, with Dr. Narang, "The sword which carved the Khalsa's way to glory, was undoubtedly, forged by Gobind, but the steel had been provided by Nanak, who had obtained it, as it were, by smelting the Hindu ore, and burning out the dross of indifference and superstition of the masses, and the hypocrisy and pharisaism of the priests."

Guru Angad, the second Guru, (1504-1552) invented the Gurmukhi script and compiled the 'Jnanam Sakhi' or biography of Guru Nanak, in Punjabi. The hymns of Guru Nanak and his successors were also recorded in the same script. By this means religious literature became available to the Sikhs in their mother tongue, the number of literates increased, and consequently, further reform work was much facilitated. The number of Sikhs went on increasing.

The third Guru (1479-1574), carried on the 'Langar' or Guru's free dining hall, more vigorously and enthusiastically than ever. It was a powerful aid in propa-

ganda work and proved an effective weapon in breaking the bonds of caste, as they dined in the Langar, irrespective of caste or creed. Further, Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, organised the Sikhs into twenty-two dioceses or provinces. As a consequence of this, propaganda work proceeded apace and the number and ardour of the Sikhs increased.

The fourth Gurn (1534-1581) founded Amritsar. It was originally, called Ramdasapur or Guru Ka Chak, which under Gurn Arjan, became the Mecca of the Sikhs.

Guru Arjan, (1563-1606) the fifth Guru, was a born poet, a practical philosopher, a great scholar, a powerful organiser, a great statesman and a magnificent builder. He compiled the Adi Granth, the Bible or Code of the Sikhs, completed the building of Hari Mander (Temple of God, now called Golden Temple) and of the temple at Taran Taran ; appointed Masands' <sup>1</sup>(Masands) or Collectors in each of the twenty-two dioceses, demarcated by the third Guru ; and sent numbers of his followers to Turkistan to purchase horses there and sell them in India. He impressed on the Sikhs the dignity of manual labour. Arts and crafts began to thrive. Many of the Sikhs became carpenters and masons. Horse trade brought large contributions to the coffers of the Sikh Church, besides developing a taste for riding among the Sikhs, who gradually became the finest horsemen in

northern India. It was thus the Fifth Guru who "encouraged a love of horsemanship among the Sikhs as a means of creating in them a spirit of enterprise and adventure." The regular collection of voluntary contributions of the Sikhs (whose contributions were fixed with the consent of donors) enabled the Guru to arrange the budget of the Sikh Church with much more certainty. The collections were presented to the Guru on the Baisakhi day. The Guru was the 'Sacha Padshah' or 'True King', for he was their spiritual Lord and Guide. The Sikhs henceforth ceased to take their civil or criminal cases to the Moghul Courts. Thus the Sikh Church was developing into an "imperium in imperio." The growth of numbers kept pace with these developments in the Sikh Church. Jahangir watched it all with grave misgiving, and when tales of Guru Arjan's monetary help in his hour of need, to prince Khusrō,<sup>1</sup> who had rebelled against the King, were carried to him, he was enraged, called the Guru to Lahore, where after suffering revolting torture, he gave up the ghost. The tragic end of the saintly Guru incensed the Sikhs beyond measures. The Sixth Guru (1595-1644) therefore, added the insignia of royalty (for instance, the sword, the umbrella the crest and the hawk) to the symbols of devotion and piety. Pelf and power were not in themselves evil things, their proper use was the essential thing, argued the Guru. <sup>2</sup> The Sixth Guru had a stable of 800 horses

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(1) The Punjab as a Sovereign State p. 81.

(2) Macauliffe Vol III pp. 85 and 91—also see Appendix A.

(3) Transformation of Sikhism p. 60.

and 300 horsemen, and sixty artillerymen formed his guard. Presents of horses and arms were the most acceptable to the Guru. The Guru dispensed justice from the Akal Takhat or Imperishable Throne (a raised dais just opposite to the Golden Temple, Amritsar), the Temple, wherein sat the Guru, was 'Durbar Sahib', and the flag was 'Nishan Sahib' (that is, the Flag of the Lord). The Fifth Guru had given the Sikhs their Bible or Code, their capital (Amritsar), a treasure and a chief in the person of the Guru. He created a theocratic state. The Sixth Guru gave the Sikhs Military organisation. The Guru was the spiritual head of the Sikhs as well as their General. His soldiers did not work for pay but because their military service pleased the Guru. Bearing arms in defence of hearths and homes, became a paramount duty of the Sikhs." "The weak must not be allowed to be trampled under foot by the tyrannous," became the general view of the community.<sup>1</sup> If the Puritans of England chafed under the autocratic sway of Charles I. so did these Puritans of the Punjab become impatient of the unjust and oppression, even to the poorest, lowliest, humblest, among them. These saint-soldiers could no longer brook oppression in any shape or form. A clash between the Moghul despotism and the Sikh soldiers became inevitable. And clashes did take place and immediately. 'In War, all is mental', said Napoleon. In the three battles fought against the provincial troops of Shah Jahan, the Sikh soldiers acquitted themselves

<sup>1</sup> "The Sikh Soldier" by P. P. Sahib, p. 32.

well. Their intense religious fervour and their firm conviction of the righteousness of the Guru's cause, coupled with the belief that the Guru was the chosen Medium of God, enabled them to defy all danger. Ideas make and unmake individuals and nations. It was easy enough to fight against Napoleon, when nationalism had been effectually aroused in Spain, and elsewhere. Ideas made the Sikhs heroes. They had now become a nation of warriors and heroes. They had not yet seen much of war but they were filled with the ardour and enthusiasm of invincible soldiers.

The immediate successor of Guru Hargobind, the Sixth Guru, was Guru Har Rai, (1630-1661) whose favourite maxim was, 'All men's hearts are Jewels ; it is wicked to distress them. If you desire to see the beloved, grieve no man's heart !'<sup>1</sup> If anything, the life and the teachings of the Guru, made the Sikhs still more sensitive to the sufferings of the poorest, the lowliest and the lost. On the other side, Aurangzebe had by that time ascended the throne of Delhi. Thus things were coming to a head.

(1621-1675) The Ninth Guru's ideal of manhood may be summed up in the following words of his own. "That man may be reckoned as the wisest of men, who gives no cause of fear to others and is himself without fear." The Sikhs were fast growing in numbers. Aurangzebe could not remain indifferent to this. The Guru was called to Delhi, and offered the choice

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(1) The Growth of Responsibility in Sikhism, p. 41.

between Death and Islam. He accepted Death. He was beheaded.

This created a storm of resentment among the Sikhs and the Hindus. The religious intolerance of Aurangzebe created similar consequences among the Rajputs and Mahrattas. There was a general conflagration. The Ponjab stood in need of a leader. The hour produced the man and Gurm Gobind Singh (1666-1708) came forth to lead them.

The resources of the Moghul empire were almost inexhaustible. The Moghul army was gigantic. The Sikhs were comparatively, but too few. They were yet novices in the craft of war. Of religious ardour and soldierly spirit among the Sikhs, there was enough and to spare. But men and money and equipment were yet neither sufficient, nor efficient. It was no child's play to fight the forces of a great empire. The Hindus were still terror-stricken. The Sikhs were not yet masters of military art and strategy, nor was their fiery zeal yet quite white-hot.

Gurm Gobind Singh's problem was how to fashion a nation with a burning, consuming passion for political freedom, with the will to dare and the soul to die. To this end, a common salvation, a common drained Sufferer (Singh) though, common external symbols, and common baptism were adopted. The main idea was to make his followers perfectly alike. The common baptism was denoted 'Khatra', or Union of God. At the same time, Khatra, Mahaniraj Khatra (The

Khalsa is the Lord's and the Lord's is the victory) became their common salutation. The water with which the Sikhs were baptised was to be stirred with dagger. The sword was to be adored, worshipped. In this sense the Sikhs became the devotees of the 'Sword. Among the five K's or external symbols, the most conspicuous was Kes or long hair. The Sikhs were to wear unshorn locks. The identity of a Sikh could not be concealed. The symbol was in a way, an open, defiant challenge to the enemies of the Khalsa. Devotion to the sword was henceforth, to be regarded as an act of the highest merit, which would bring them power and prosperity in this life and bliss and beatitude in the next."<sup>2</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh's wondrous, soul-stirring war-like poetry and the constant recitation of the exploits of the heroes of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata infused a new life into the hearts of the Sikhs. Those who had never touched a sword or shouldered a gun became heroes. Confectioners and washermen, sweepers and barbers became leaders of armies. Of the Guru's Beloved Five, one was a Khatri, the rest belonged to the so-called depressed classes. The Guru's word went forth that sweepers were his (Guru's) own sons (Rangreta Guru ka beta) Their social status rose. The Guru was the Father of the Khalsa. The Guru was their True King, their tem-

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1 Macauliffe. Vol. V. p. 82.

2 Transformation of Sikhism p. 87.



poral and spiritual head, their infallible Guide, their true medium between themselves and God Almighty. The Guru's pleasure lay in their devotion to the sword and love of death. The terror of death was gone. Death was familiarly called "an expedition of the Khalsa into next world." Devotion to the Guru became the be-all and end-all of their life. This ardent spirit of self-sacrifice and self-renunciation enabled the Guru to say with pride and confidence that one Sikh was a unit of a lakh and a quarter. Once a new musket was brought to the Guru as a present. He wanted to try it, as he humorously said, at some body's forehead. Several people came forward, vying with one another to be his target, thinking it a great fortune to meet death at his hands. The Guru's devotion to the Sikhs was equally great. "To serve them pleases my heart; no other service is so dear to my soul," said he. When the news was brought to him that two of his sons had been bricked up alive, while the remaining two had died fighting on the field of battle, he joyfully said: "What if I have lost four sons, there are thousands of my sons (Sikhs) living still." This was the spirit with which the Guru and the Sikhs were imbued. If and when soldiers are saturated with this spirit they become irresistible. Some hand-fought conflicts with the commander of the Imperial troops covered the Sikh with a halo of glory, though they had not so many victories, as they had to fight against overwhelming odds. Their spirit was unconquerable and that is what tells in the long run.

<sup>1</sup> The conciliatory policy of Bahadur Shah, silenced the tumult of war for a while. The sword was sheathed. The Guru chose his solitary abode in the far-off Deccan, on the banks of the Godavari. The end came in 1708. On the throne of Delhi, Bahadur Shah was, after a brief interval, followed by Farrukh Siyar. The Sikhs were outlawed, a price was set on their heads, and they began to be persecuted ruthlessly. Banda, with his devoted band of Sikh fighters harried the land between Sarhand and Panipat, carried fire and sword and desolation wherever he went. He was, however, ultimately captured in 1716, and executed with every refinement of torture, at Delhi. Banda's atrocities were reprehensible but by inflicting some defeats on the Moghul army, he had completely broken the charm of the invincibility of the Moghul forces.<sup>2</sup> It encouraged the enemies of the Moghul Empire, and lowered the morale and prestige of the royal army. After Banda's execution the campaign of persecution and repression against the Sikhs was launched afresh with ruthless severity. The Sikhs fled to jungles, hills and deserts of Rajputana. Farrukh Siyar's end came in 1719, and the reins of the vast empire passed into the hands of the easy-going Mohammad Shah. The weak rule of Mohammad Shah, the tempestuous sweep of Nadir Shah in 1738, Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions, following each other in

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(1) Macauliffe Vol V. pp. 230 and 236 (new edition)  
Also Sarkar's 'Aurangzebe' p. 167 (Abridged edition in one volume.)

(2) Transformation of Sikhism p.118.

quick succession, and the raids of the Mahrattas, all combined together, paralysed the Moghul empire. In the mean time, the Sikhs, outlawed as they had been, would now and then, emerge from their haunts and retreats, swoop down upon the country, make off with whatever they could lay their hands upon, and gallop back, post-haste, to their safe retreats. Like Robin-hood and his merry band of outlaws, their blows fell heaviest on the rulers and their supporters and adherents. Their reckless daring spread terror and consternation all around. This was, if anything, augmented by their swooping down, with the speed and effect of lightning, on the rear of Nadir's and Ahmad Shah's army. The invincible Nadir exclaimed, "Whence come those long-haired barbarians? Destroy them and their homes."<sup>1</sup> "Their homes are the saddles on their horses," was the reply. The Sikhs thus trained in the school of experience, became splendid horsemen and adepts in the art of guerrilla warfare. Every now and then, they would come like wind, carry away whatever they could seize, and vanish like whirlwind. The authorities were helpless. The bonds of law and order weakened. More people joined these bands of free-lancers, and their numbers went on swelling from more to more, till at last the country was thrown into utter confusion. There were some among the authorities who made an effort to put law and order by all means, but to no purpose, till a need arose of honour, to

the Sikhs. The<sup>2</sup> Sikhs viewed these things with social indifference. <sup>1</sup> In 1733, the title of Nawab and a Jagir of Rs. 100,000 was tossed from man to man, like a foot-ball and nobody was willing to accept it, till at last, one Capur Singh, who was moving the Pankha in the assembly condescended to accept it. But men like Mir Moin-ud-din (who came to govern the Punjab in 1748) followed a different policy. He thought of dealing with the Sikhs with an iron hand and a mailed fist. The Sikhs followed the old tactics of hide-and-seek. The strong dose of repression failed to crush their dare-devil spirit. The sledge-hammer of repression might fall on them, but they sang merrily,

“Mannu” (the Sikhs called Moin-ud-Din as Mannu)  
asadi datri, asi Mannu de soe,

jion jion Mannu wadhda, gharin gharin asi hoe !

<sup>2</sup> We are the crop, and Mannu the sickle,

The more he cuts us, the more we grow,

In every house and hamlet ”

Between 1738-1768 anarchy reigned supreme in the Punjab. It was a God-send to the Sikhs, and mainly their own creation. Bands, or confederacies (Sikhs called them bands of equals or Misals) of these daring and reckless horsemen would roam at will from end to end of the Punjab, and beyond it, gradually establishing their sway from the frontier of Oudh to the Indus<sup>2</sup>. Forster (I—p. 333) guardedly estimates the forces of the con-

(1) Transformation of Sikhism p. 125.

(2) Cunningham—History of the Sikhs p.p. 117-118.

federacies (there were twelve important confederacies) at 200,000. The simple, untrained peasant, of the days of the sixth Guru, after twenty years' constant fighting under Guru Gobind Singh and Banda (1696-1716) and by his subsequent experience, had become a regular, and efficient soldier of the Khalsa, adept in the use of arms, and trained in the methods of guerilla warfare. The Sikhs were kept together by the fervour of their faith. The whole Sikh people met at least once a year at Amritsar on the occasion of Dussehra. They met there to hold Gurmattas (councils of the Khalsa) to undertake joint military expeditions. They met as a brotherhood of equals. They were intrepid and adventurous. Their activities were way-inspiring. Forster amusingly describes the alarm caused to a little chief and his people by the appearance of a couple of Sikh horsemen under the walls of their fort and the obsequious attention paid to them by the local authorities.<sup>1</sup> As late as the close of the 18th century, there were funny ideas current about the Sikhs. The following quotation from Franklin's *History of the Reign of Shah Aulum*, is typical:—

"The Sikhs in their persons are tall and of a manly, erect deportment; their aspect is ferocious, their eyes piercing and animated; and in tracing their features a striking resemblance is observable to the Arabs. . . . The dress of the males consists of a coarse cloth of blue cotton, thrown loosely over the shoulder, and coming down to the middle of the leg, is fastened round the waist by a belt of

cotton. An ample turban of blue cloth covers the head and over this is frequently worn a sash of silk, and cotton mixed . . . They speak the Aufghan or Pooshto language with prolific additions of Persian, Arabic, and Hindoovee." <sup>1</sup> Their diet was coarse and temperate. They were known to make marches of forty or fifty miles a day and that for many days together. They lived chaste and simple lives. <sup>2</sup> Once while Ahmad Shah Abdali was carrying away as booty a large number of girls and women from India, news was conveyed to Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the leader of one of the Misals. He started in pursuit of Ahmad Shah and making a successful night attack upon his camp rescued the helpless creatures and providing them liberally with money and other necessities, sent them all home under proper escort.

<sup>3</sup> Again, when Jassa Singh, Ramgarhia (chief of the Ramgarhia Misal) sacked Hissar, he rescued two Brahman girls from the governor of the place, who had forcibly carried them away.

The <sup>4</sup> proselytising zeal of the chiefs of confederacies was also marked and a number of Hindus and Muham-madens became Sikhs or rather Singhs:

A brief resume of the chapter would not perhaps, be out of place here. The number of Sikhs had been fast growing, their religious enthusiasm was marked;

(1) Foister-1 pp. 333 and 335.

(2) Also Malcolme's Sketch pp. 141,142.

(3) Transformation of Sikhism pp. 168-169.

(4) Transformation of Sikhism p. 171.

during the time of the fifth Guru, the Sikhs had practically organised a theocratic state; the Moghul rulers viewed it all as a menace to their empire; the military organisation of the Sixth Guru intensified this impression of the rulers, while the intolerent policy of Aurangzebe brought things to a head, and the conflict between the Sikhs and the rulers began in right earnest. The Sikhs were bound together by their glowing religious faith, and their ardent religious fervour. Common danger had eliminated distinctions of caste, and dissipated the orthodox superstition of 'untouchability'. The Sikhs were brothers and comrades-in-arms. They had common religious traditions, and a common goal originally, self-preservation and protection of their faith, and after Farukh Siyar's persecution, and their outlawry, the snatching of the sceptre from their rulers. The decadence of the Moghul empire, and the invasions of Nadar and Ahmad Shah ushered in an era of anarchy, and the Sikhs seizing the golden opportunity, established the sway of their bands or Misals (confederacies) from the frontier of Oudh to the Indus. It must however, be remembered that even though the Sikhs had, in the course of their development, got transformed from mere saints into warrior-saints, and in the period of Misals from warrior-saints into retaliatory freedom-fighters, one feeling still inspired them—that they were fighting for the Guru, and that the Guru's cause (as understood by them) was supremely sacred.

This was the mentality of the Sikhs when Ranjit Singh (later on, Maharaja Ranjit Singh), head of one of the Misals, started his dazzling career of conquest. As already said, he found the Sikh soldiers full of religious zeal. It would be interesting to know, how far and by what means he further deepened and intensified this religious atmosphere, and with what results. I shall deal with this aspect of the question in a succeeding chapter.



## CHAPTER II

### Recruitment, Discipline, etc., in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Time

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Before the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the army of the Khalsa consisted entirely of horsemen, brave indeed, but ignorant of war as an art. The saddle was the home of the Khalsa for several generations and in 1753, Forster (1-p 333) guardedly estimated the total number of Sikh horsemen at 200,000. They were armed with a matchlock and a sabre (Forster 1-332). Their method of fighting was queer, indeed. A party from forty to fifty would advance in quick pace to the distance of a carbine shot from the enemy, and then, that the fire might be given with the greater certainty, the horses were drawn up, and their pieces discharged; when speedily retiring about a hundred paces, they loaded and repeated the same mode of annoying the enemy. The horses were so well trained to the performance of this operation, that on receiving a stroke of the hand, they stopped from a full career.

Sikh horsemen fought under their chiefs and all that a Sikh chief asked from a follower was a horse, and a matchlock, and all that a follower sought was protection and a share in the plunder.

Their offensive arms were generally *a matchlock, a spear and a sword*, and their defensive armour merely *a shield*, supplemented in the winter by *a thickly scaddled coat*, serving the double purpose of defence and warmth. The leaders carried no matchlock, its place being taken by pistols and a bow, the latter a symbol of rank, which was retained by the Sikh nobles and Rajas until the end. They alone were usually armoured in chain-mail, with steel caps, back and breast plates, arm-guards, gauntlets and shields.

<sup>2</sup> The infantry soldier was considered altogether inferior to the cavalry, and was in time of war, left behind to garrison forts, or to look after the women.

The Maharaja changed the entire organisation of the Khalsa army. The cavalry ceased to be the most important arm, and the infantry became the favourite service. Foreign officers (though the Maharaja failed to obtain the loan of British officers from the East India Company) were employed, and the infantry, under their instructions, became a <sup>3</sup> well disciplined, steady, and formidable body of troops. According to Cunningham (p. 222) Maharaja Ranjit Singh left 50,000 well-disciplined soldiers, 50,000 well armed yeomanry and militia, and more than 300 field guns. According to Mr. Garrett (Cunningham's 'History of Sikhs', p. 416) edited by Mr. Garrett) the total number of men in the army

(1) Grey and Garnett's *European Adventures of Northern India*. p. 18. Also Malcolme's 'Sketch of the Sikhs' p. 141

(2) Griffin's p.133.

(3) Griffin's p.134.

and artillery, in 1841 was 51,050, besides 230 guns (not including swivels.)

The Maharaja devoted particular attention to his infantry. <sup>1</sup> He encouraged it by good pay, by personal attention to their drill and equipment, by himself wearing the strange dress, and going through the formal exercise. He attended parades in person, and distributed gifts of money, etc, to those of his foot soldiers and others with whose work he felt pleased (M. Sohan Lal-II Part p. 298). He offered *big Jagirs* and *stipends* to Sikh Sardars' sons to serve in the infantry. As a result of his efforts the infantry became the mainstay of the army. <sup>2</sup> A standing national army, regularly paid from the Treasury of the State—rather than the feudal levies of the Chiefs—became the recognised policy of the Maharaja.

The army was officered by Europeans, Hindus, Sikhs, Mohammadans, Rajputs—on a cosmopolitan basis, indeed. In the initial stages, however, the Maharaja got part of his army trained by deserters from the East India Company, by men formerly employed under Scindia, or by those who had resigned East India Company's service.

<sup>2</sup> Enlistment in the regular army in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time was, so to say, entirely voluntary.

The service was popular, and the recruits felt a peculiar attraction for it.

<sup>1</sup> The infantry were the pick of the youth of the land; only the handsomest and strongest men were selected.

General Ventura, an Italian General, who had fought under Napoleon, was put in charge of the infantry, in 1822. <sup>2</sup> The European Generals gave "a moderate degree of precision and completeness to a system already introduced; but their labours are more conspicuous in *French words of command*, in treble ranks, and in squares *salient* with guns, than in the ardent courage, the alert obedience, and the long endurance of fatigue which already distinguished the Sikh horsemen, and which pre-eminently characterise the Sikh footmen of the present day among the other soldiers of India."

In the beginning the Sikhs disliked the rigidity and precision of the infantry drill. <sup>3</sup> They scoffed at it and called it a dance or '(Rugs Looluan) or dancing girls' dance. As already said, the Maharaja's tact, perseverance, his great personal interest in the infantry, and offers of gifts, Jagirs, etc, all combined together overcame all opposition, and the infantry became the corps d'elite.

<sup>4</sup> Special officers were put in charge of recruits and

(1) Griffin-p. 135.

(2) Cunningham p. 174.

(3) Dr. Chopras, The Punjab as a Sovereign State-p. 92.

(4) Mr. S. R. Kohli's part IV I-p.<sup>4</sup>

after the period of instruction, were presented to the Maharaja by the 'Bakhshi,'—and on the Maharaja's acceptance, their descriptive rolls were prepared. These descriptive rolls were the service book, plus personal file of today.

<sup>1</sup> A traveller who saw the Punjab in 1836 says: "The privates are tall, thin men with good features; they are *capable of bearing the fatigue of long marches for several days in succession*, so that it has become a by-word that the Panjabis have iron legs. On their marches, they encamp very regularly, and I saw 30,000 men, the army of Peshawar, moved with as much facility as a single regiment on this (the British) side of the Sutlej. *No wheeled carriage is allowed, and their own bullocks contain all they require.*"

barracks. Light tents and pack animal were allowed for each battalion, and two cooks for each company.

<sup>1</sup> *The Company Officers were :—Subedar, Jamadar, Sarjan (Serjeant), Havildar, Naik, 'Phuriya' (from Furrer), Bugler, Trumpeter. The regimental officers were :—Commandant (Kumedan ?), Adjutant, Major, Writer, Accountant, Granthi. Each battalion had a number of camp followers, as camel-drivers, water carriers, smiths, flag-bearers, spademen, baidars, masons, and cooks. One tent was supplied to every seven men of the rank and file.*

<sup>2</sup> *A General was paid Rs. 400/—460/., a Colonel Rs. 300/—350/-, Subedar, Rs. 20/—30/-, Jamadar, Rs. 15/—22/-, a Commandant Rs. 60/—150/-, a major Rs. 21/—25/- a sepoy Rs. 7/—8½/- (per mensem) Generals Ventura and Allard received about Rs. 25,000 per annum.*

Total Strength in 1811: 4,061

„ „ „ 1845: 70,721

The foot soldiers worked in their ranks and did every thing by beat of drum. Beautifully steady on parade, they fired with great precision and regularity. " They are tall, rather slight, but very manly looking men, with great length of limb, and broad, open chests; are excellent marchers, both as regards speed and bottom, marching with cheerfulness and alacrity," for days together. They are hardly far beyond the generality of natives, and seem a merry, light-hearted race of people". (Osborne—The Camp and Court of Ranjit

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(1) Mr. S.R. Kohli's Army of Ranjit Singh I part.

(2) Mr. S.R. Kohli's Army of Ranjit Singh I part.

Singh, p.p. 102-104.) Baron Hugel says (p.289),

"... The men marched past; the word of command was given in French, and the exercise was gone through with much precision.... I observed, that I was surprised to find his" (Maharaja's) "troops so proficient in European tactics."

<sup>1</sup> Captain Wade wrote to Sir (later on Lord) Metcalfe, "... had a distant view of the Legion commanded by the French officers Messrs Allard and Ventura at exercise. It appeared to be a remarkably fine body of men. Again, "I could not help remarking the cheerful alacrity with which the Sikhs seemed to endure the fatigue." M. Ventura put his Legion through several manoeuvres which the Corps executed with a steadiness and precision it would be difficult to excel." - <sup>2</sup> Burton's following remarks are however, a sad commentary on the behaviour of officers towards their subordinates:—

"On parade, they give utterance to abusive expressions, striking freely any of a rank inferior to their own. The commandant cues the adjutant, who in turn strikes the officers at the heads of 'Companies,' who again vent their ill humour on the non-commissioned and privates."

<sup>3</sup> Maharaja Ranjit Singh held a *general parade* of

his entire army on the day of the *Dussehra* festival, either at *Lahore* or *Amritsar*. On such occasions the presence of every man, from the highest officer down to the ordinary soldier was compulsory. Recalcitrants were punished.

<sup>2</sup> There were *godowns* for storing grain, flour, etc, erected at a distance of thirty or forty *kos* from one another on the march, and the men were supplied with rations, when necessary, from them.

The national flag of the *Khalsa* was of Saffron colour, and the full-throated shout of 'Sat Sri Akal' was their war cry.

So far I have dealt with the regularly trained, drilled, and disciplined infantry of the Maharaja. They were directly paid by the state. It may be designated as the regular army. It was indeed, called *Fauj-i-am* or regular army.

2. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's cavalry was divided into three classes :—

1. *Regular cavalry*.

2. *Ghorcharah*.

3. *Jagirdari Fauj*.

<sup>4</sup> The regular cavalry of the Maharaja were a fine body of men, in appearance, equipment, and discipline. They had gone through an efficient course of training

2. The Punjab as a Sovereign State p. 270.

3. (Captain Wade's Letters).

4. Mr. S.R. Kohli's Army of Ranjit Singh, Vol. II Part II. Journal of, Indian History, for June 1923, p p. 178 and 181.



on western lines, under the Maharaja's French General Jean Francois *Allard*. Like General *Ventura*, he was engaged by the Maharaja in 1822. The men and horses of the regular cavalry were all picked. <sup>1</sup> The stalwart cavaliers wore cuirasses and steel casques.

The strength of the regular cavalry in 1811, was 1,209, in 1838, 4,090 and in 1845, 6,235.

<sup>1</sup> The *Ghorcharah Fauj* and *jagirdari cavalry* did not undergo regular training, as the regular cavalry did. They knew little of (and perhaps, cared less for) the principles of modern organisation, or the science of war, nor did they follow any prescribed rules of strict discipline. They were organised on the model of the old *Khalsa* army, that is, horsemen of the days of the Sikh confederacies or *Misals*, who believed that the dash of a cavalry charge, and reckless courage were enough

being Rs. 100/- for the horse, Rs. 10/- 20/-, for a match-lock, and Rs. 10/- for a sword. <sup>1</sup> A lean, thin horse was rejected for service. The trooper had then Rs. 10/- a month deducted from his pay, till the animal became well, and was again, passed as fit, or a new horse was provided. In case the horse died, the trooper drew the pay of a foot soldier till he provided himself with another.

The pay of a trooper varied from Rs. 22/- to Rs. 26/- p.m.

<sup>2</sup> The Ghorcharaha Fauj was sub-divided into *ghorcharaha Khas*, and *Misaldar Sawars*. The Ghorcharaha Khas comprised only one regiment. It was almost entirely recruited from amongst the nobility of the province. The Misaldar Sawars originally, belonged to several independant chieftains, but in the overthrow of their masters, had been transferred to the Maharaja's service.

<sup>3</sup> Jagirdari Cavalry.

The cavalry maintained by Jagirdars or fief-holder was called Jagirdari Fauj. The Jagirdari Fauj was at one time, estimated at 20,000 men. A fief-holder was, according to the terms of the grant of Jagir, in duty bound to furnish a certain number of efficient and well equipped troopers, whenever required by the state. They were required to present themselves for a review

(1) Catalogue of Khalsa Durbar records Vol 1 page 106 and pp. 188-189.

(2) 'Army of Ranjit Singh Part IV-p.13

(3) p. 184.

of their troops, once a year, on the day of *Dusshra Festival*. To guard against corruption and cheating, a Jagirdar was required to deposit in the Record-office of the State, a *descriptive roll of all the members of his contingent*. <sup>2</sup> *S. Hari Singh Nakra* was once, fined and made to pay a sum of Rs. *two Lakhs*, for entertaining less than the stipulated number of men. Stern measures like these were indeed, the most effective check against corruption on the part of Jagirdars.

<sup>4</sup> The chiefs or Jagirdars kept their contingents in good condition, for on this depended the renewal or enhancement of their Jagir.

<sup>5</sup> The irregular cavalry of M. Ranjit Singh was a fine body of intrepid and resourceful horsemen. They were devoted to the Chief, and jealous of the honour of the Khalsa. They played a conspicuous part in conquering for the Maharaja the provinces of Jammu, Kangra, Multan, and Kashmir. "By their desperate courage the Ghorakhatris had earned for themselves a name and for Ranjit Singh a kingdom."

<sup>6</sup> Osborne, in his *Camp and Court of Ranjit Singh*, speaks of some irregular regiments, composed entirely of *Malis*. The Maharaja employed them on "very

dangerous, or desperate service". It was not an uncommon sight to see Akalis riding about with a drawn sword in each hand, two more in their belt, a matchlock at their back and three or four pairs of quoits, fastened round their turbans. Akali Phula Singh was the head of this reckless band of warriors.

### Garrisons or *Fauj-i-Qilajat*

<sup>1</sup> Important forts like Attock, Peshawar, Multan, Kangra, and Kashmir were strongly garrisoned, and provided with stores of grains and war material. The total strength was about 10,800, in time of peace. The pay of a garrison infantry soldier ranged between Rs 5/- and Rs 7/-p.m. The Jamadar received double the sum or even more. The salaries of the garrison were paid through the officer incharge, called *Thanedar*, to whom the necessary amount of money was advanced by letters of authority drawn on the Kardar or Collector of the District. Among others, the following instructions were issued to the Thanedars of forts:—

<sup>2</sup> 1. Not to admit within the fort dancing-girls, musicians, etc.

2. To see that there should be no clash between the soldiers, and the civil population of the neighbouring district.

3. To see that the men did not become wicked or addicted to drinking.

(1) J. I. H. for June 23, pp. 200-00, 204-205.

(2) 'Army of Ranjit Singh Vol II part II J. I. H. June, 1923, p.p.200-201 and 204-205,

4. To see that the men paid their dues to shopkeepers regularly, month by month.

5. To see that the men did not spend more than half their pay, the rest to be sent to dependants.

6. To dismiss those who created a row in the town, and getting tipsy, were a source of mischief and scandal.

## ARTILLERY

There were :—1. Top Khana Shutri or Camel Swivels or Zamburaks,

<sup>1</sup> 2. *Tophana Gazi* or Bullock Batteries,

3. *Top Khana Filt* or Elephant Batteries,

4. *Top Khana Aspi* or Horse Batteries.

<sup>2</sup> Of infantry and artillery, the Sikhs knew very little before the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Maharaja organised a regular ordinance department and employed a number of European Officers, for instance, Generals Court and Gardner. Gardner was popularly called Gardona Sahib. <sup>3</sup> General Court joined the Maharaja's service in 1817, General Gardner in 1812. Under their guidance the Maharaja's artillery became a highly organised and efficient arm of his army. <sup>4</sup> It was the Maharaja's conviction that the easy victories gained by the English over numerically superior Indian army, were entirely due to their steady artillery fire, which they

directed upon the ranks of the enemy.

S. Lehna Singh Majithia was, as Sir Lepel Griffin says (p.131), an original inventor. He considerably improved the Sikh ordnance. A number of good, beautiful guns had been cast by him.<sup>1</sup> The Maharaja's guns were cast in his own foundry at Lahore. The principal workshops were situated in Lahore, within the fort, as well as, in other parts of the town. Each gun had its own individual name, and a dignified name, too, as *Fateh Jang*, (Victorious in War), *Jang-i-Bijli*, (Destroyer like lightning), etc. Some of the guns had Persian inscriptions on them, opening with Sri Akal Sahai, or God Our Help.

<sup>2</sup> Swords, spears, matchlocks, and pistols were also made in Lahore and elsewhere. Armour consisting of helmets, Coats of mail, shields; breast plates and gauntlets were manufactured at various places notably Amritsar, Multan, Jammu and Srinagar. Kashmiri artisans, and later on, trained craftsmen under the supervision of officers like Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia, Faqir Nur-ud-Din, Doctor Honigberrger, and other Europeans carried on the work of casting, boring, polishing, and decorating guns and pistol barrels.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the efficiency of the Maharaja's artillery, Osborne in his "Camp and Court of Ranjit Singh" speaks thus :—

(1) p. 404 ii J.I.H for September p. 408.

(2) 'The Punjab as a Sovereign State' p. 112.

(3) p. 160-161.

"22nd June—After going down the line of infantry, we crossed the river with Ranjit Singh, in order to inspect his artillery, which we found drawn up on the opposite bank. It consisted of a battery of 53 horse artillery, nine pounders, cast in brass in his own foundry at Lahore, from the patterns of those presented to him by Lord William Bentinck. *The only discreditable part of his artillery in appearance is harness, which is patched and shabby but the horses though small, appeared to be active and in very tolerable condition.* He is very proud of the efficiency and admirable condition of his artillery, and justly so, for no native power has yet possessed so large and well disciplined a corps."

.....All the shot was formed of beaten iron, and cost a rupee each, and the majority of shells were composed of pewter.....When it is considered that all we saw, was the work of General's (General Court) own knowledge, and we reflect on the difficulties he has had to surmount, it is a matter almost of wonder to behold the perfection to which he has brought his artillery."

<sup>1</sup> In 1819-20, the Maharaja had 22 guns and 190 Swivels; in 1828-29, 130 guns and 280 swivels, in 1838-39, 188 guns and 280 swivels; in 1845-46, 376 guns and 300 swivels.

<sup>2</sup> To officers and men in the artillery, the Maharaja gave presents on a lavish scale, for their proficiency and merits. This proved a great incentive to them and the officers worked hard, early and late.

<sup>3</sup> *Mian Qadir Bakhsh* (grandfather of the late Mr. Justice Shah Din, and an ancestor of the late Sir Mian Mohd Shafli) was one of the men whom the Maharaja sent to Ludhiana to learn gunnery. On his return, he wrote a book called '*Miftah-ul-Qilah*' in Persian,

Sir Lepel Griffin (pp. 86-87) significantly remarks.

"*The Sikh weapon was the sword with which the cavalry were very skilful. Bows and arrows were used by the infantry, and a few match locks; . Although Ranjit Singh, with the aid of French and Italian officers, formed a very powerful and well-appointed artillery, it was to the last, a branch of the service hated by every*

(1) II, p. 405 ('Army of Ranjit Singh')

(2) p. 401. " "

(3) p. 408, " "



true Sikh and principally filled by Mohammedans."<sup>1</sup> Among others the following points about the Sikh army in the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors are noticeable:—

1. Service in the army was open to all, irrespective of caste and creed.

2. Though there were no well-defined rules governing promotion, *merit or conspicuous service seldom went unrewarded.*

3. Indiscipline, insubordination and neglect of duty were variously punished with fine, loss of pay and rank, imprisonment in quarters and dismissal.

4. There was *no definite age limit* either for entering service or for compulsory retirement. It appears that men between the age of *twenty and thirty-eight were generally regarded as being fit for military duty and that they continued to serve up to the age of sixty-five or some times even more.*

the perfection of his army, particularly his infantry and artillery. This appears still more significant, when it is remembered that by the year 1820, <sup>1</sup> Maharaja Ranjit Singh's power throughout the Punjab proper, from the Sutlej to the Indus was practically absolute and undisputed. It is indeed, true that years before the advent of Generals Ventura and Allard, many of the Sikh regiments had undergone drill and discipline of the European type, but it was mere Naiks and ordinary men, inter-alia, deserters from the East India Company, who had drilled and disciplined the Maharaja's men. The reckless courage of the Khalsa army had achieved triumph after triumph, victory after victory, till the whole area from the Sutlej to the Indus lay at their feet. What further achievements could he have in view, to tempt him to employ more than one hundred European military officers, and to put his army through perfect military discipline on the European model. Could he be thinking of the conquest of Sindh? But the Amirs of Sindh were no match for him, and even without European discipline, his arm could have easily crushed them. Was it fear of Afghanistan? Probably not; the reckless daring, dash and plan of the Sikh army had even before 1822, the year of enlistment in service, of Generals Ventura and Allard, proved the superiority of the Sikh army and the resources of the Maharaja over those of Afghans. Then what could be the cause of the feverish activity of the Maharaja in perfecting his war machine, particularly his infantry and artillery.

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<sup>1</sup> Griffin's 'Ranjit Singh' p.206.

Was it not due to his fear of the ever-growing power and dominion of the English? One might argue that he was a firm ally of the British and, was ever loyal to the treaty of 1809. Yes, he was loyal to the terms of the treaty, but was not his loyalty due to his consciousness of the superior power of the Company? And did he not chafe under the restraints imposed upon him by the British, regarding Cis-Sutlej States, Ferozepur, Sindh etc? He did chafe, but it would seem that he felt helpless. Was it not this consciousness of his own inferior position, as compared with the war machine of the East India Company, which impelled him to perfect and augment his own army? I believe, that this was the underlying motive. The army did become extraordinarily efficient. European observers paid his army pushing tributes of praise. We shall see in a succeeding chapter, whether the Maharaja's army justified the hopes of the Maharaja, and whether it was not the rigid discipline undergone by the army, which enabled them to face the British so heroically, whereas no other Asiatic power had been able to offer any resistance worth the name.

## CHAPTER III

### His Dress and Equipment

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<sup>1</sup>In the period preceding Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule, the Sikhs had no decent uniform. The common trooper was clad in Pagri or turban, and Kurta or shirt with open sleeves, and a pair of short drawers, with tight-fitting slippers. Each horseman provided himself with *two blankets, one for himself and the other for his horse*. They were armed with a *spear, a match-lock, and a scimitar*. Speaking of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's infantry, Osborne in his "Camp and Court of Ranjit Singh," says:—

"They are a fine looking body of men dressed in white jackets and trousers, with black belts and pouches, and wear the yellow Sikh (Sikh) turban." 'Again he says, "I never saw so straight or beautiful a line with any troops. They were all dressed in white, with black cross-belts, and either a red or yellow Sikh turban, armed with *muskets and bayonets* of excellent manufacture from Ranjit's foundry at Lahore." The Regular Brigades, in full dress, wore *red coats*. ("European Adventurers of Northern India", p. 27, 3rd para).

<sup>2</sup> According to Dr. Chopra, the uniform of the

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(1) The Punjab as a Sovereign State p. 83. pp. 102 and 154-155.

(2) "The Punjab as a Sovereign State." pp. 90-91, 258, 262, 294, 311, 326, (Wade's Letters.)

infantry men was scarlet. *The trousers were of blue cotton cloth, and turbans were of the same colour.* It appears however, that the colour of turbans was different in each battalion. Yellow turbans appear to have been very common, in the case of infantry, as well as, cavalry.

<sup>1</sup>The dress of the *dragoons* consisted of a jacket of dull red with broad facings of buff, crossed in front by a pair of black belts, one of which supported a pouch, and the other a bayonet. Round the waist, the dragoons wore a Kamarbund, partially concealed by a sword-belt, from which hung a *sabre* with a brass hilt, and leathern scabbard. The carbine was so attached as to give it the appearance of being slung across the back of the dragoon, but rested in fact, in a bucket fastened to the saddle. The *'trousers'* were of dark blue cloth, with a red stripe, and the turbans of crimson silk, brought some what into a peak in front, and ornamented in the centre with a small brass half-moon, from which sprang a glittering spring about two inches in height. The officers were attired from top to toe in bright crimson silk, and were armed with a *saïe* only. The uniform of the *cuirassiers* consisted of a short blue coat and a pair of dark trousers with a narrow red stripe tightly strapped over Wellington boots and spurs. The cuirass was of highly polished steel or brass, and bore a Giltie cock in the centre of

the breast-plate. The *head-dress* was a round *steel cap* from the apex of which sprung a red horsehair plume. From the cap depended a curtain of chain-mail, which hung down near the neck and shoulders. The arms consisted of a *carbine*, and a long steel *sword* depending from the waist-belt by steel chains. A black leather waist-belt, and a pouch belt completed the outfit. Barron Hugel, speaking of irregular battalions says;—

“We fell in with two Sikh battalions marching towards Peshawar, fine well-dressed men, with long blue coats and turbans. They were irregular troops.”

<sup>1</sup> Lord Auckland speaking of the irregular cavalry says, “The next day the personal retainers and irregular cavalry passed by on horse back, and along a road through one of his (Ranjit Singh’s) flower gardens. About 5,000 of the most picturesque people in chain-armour, brass-plates, cuirasses, shields, spears and dresses of every colour of the rain-bow, with horses bounding along like heroes at *Astley’s*.” Again, he speaks of horse-men in these terms :—

“He” (M. Ranjit Singh) “has here irregular horse-men innumerable with their metal caps, heron-like plumes, and silk dresses, the most picturesque troops in the world.”

<sup>2</sup> Baron Hugel speaks of ‘Ghorcharahas’ in the following terms :—

(1) The Punjab as a Sovereign State, pp. 118-119.

(2) Baron Huegel’s ‘Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab’ p.241.

‘I requested leave to inspect them (the Ghoracharahas) and never beheld finer, nor a more remarkably striking body of men. Each one was dressed differently, and yet so much in the same fashion, that they all looked in perfect keeping..... The uniform consisted of a *velvet coat* or gabardine over which most of them wore a *shirt of mail*..... A belt round the waist, richly embroidered in gold, supported the powder-horn, covered with cloth of gold as well as the Persian Katar and the *pistol*, which many of them carried, in addition to these weapons. Some wore a *steel helmet*, inlaid with gold, and surmounted with Kalga or black heron’s plume; others wore a *cap of steel*, worked like a cuirass in rings. The left arm is often covered from hand to the elbow with a *steel cuff* inlaid with gold. The round Sikh *shield* hangs on the back, fastened with straps across the chest, a *quiver* at the right side, and a bow slung at the back being carried as part of the equipment; a bag made in the belt holds the balls, and a *tall bagonet*, frequently ornamented with gold, held in the right hand when the man is on foot, and carried over the shoulder, when in the saddle, completes the dress.”

Osborne speaks of the dress, worn by Maharaja Ranjit Singh's body-guard on a particular ceremonial occasion, in the following terms :—

1 "They" (The body-guard of Ranjit Singh) were formed in a line, through which the Governor General and his Court had to pass, one troop dressed in yellow satin, with gold scarfs and shawls, the other in cloth of gold, scarlet, purple or yellow; their arms all of gold; they had long beards down to their waists; and their heads were enveloped in a drapery of silver or gold tissue, which was brought over their beards to protect them from the dust."

Sir Lepel Griffin describing the irregular levies and Jagirdari contingents, says :—

2 "The irregular levies and Jagirdari contingents were the picturesque element in the Maharaja's reviews. Many of the men were well-to-do country gentlemen, the sons, relations, or clans-men of the chiefs, who placed them in the field and maintained them there, and whose personal credit was concerned in their personal appearance.

There was no uniformity in their dress. Some wore a shirt of mail, with a helmet, inlaid with gold and a Kalgi or heron's plume; others were gay, with the many-coloured splendours of velvet and silk, with pink or yellow muslin turbans, and gold embroidered belts, carrying their *sword and powder-horn*. *All wore at the*

(1) Camp and Court of Ranjit Singh p.p. 214-215

(2) Ranjit Singh p.p. 143-144.



*back, the small round shield of tough buffalo hide. These magnificent horsemen were armed, some with bows and arrows but the majority with match locks, with which they made excellent practice. Griffin continues : "The regular troops were much less picturesque than the Jagirdari horse. Their dress was a close imitation of the scarlet uniforms worn by the British army, singularly ungraceful on native troops."*

Thanks to the Archeological Department, there is now a museum within the Lahore fort, wherein jackets, bayonets, swords, shields, lances, breast-plates, back-plates, steel-armour, steel-helmets, shells, etc, used by the army of Maharaja, have been carefully preserved.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SIKH SOLDIER

#### His Habits

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Of the Sikhs of the period of confederacies, Forster says :—

“The personal endowments of the Sicques (Sikhs) are derived from a *temperance of diet*, and a forbearance from many of those sensual pleasures which have enervated the Indian Mahometans. A body of their cavalry has been known to make *marches of forty or fifty miles*, and to continue the exertion for many successive days” Again, he says, “The Sicques are in general strong and well-made; accustomed from their infancy to the most laborious life, and *hardest fare*; they make marches and undergo fatigues that really appear astonishing. In their excursions, they carry no tents or baggage, except, perhaps a small tent for the principal officer; the rest shelter themselves under blankets, which serve them also in the cold weather to wrap themselves in, and which on a march cover their saddles. The *food* of the Sikhs is *of the coarsest kind*. Bread baked in ashes, and soaked in *mash* made by different sorts of pulse, is the best dish, and such as they never indulge in but when at full leisure, otherwise *vetches and tares*, hastily parched; is all they care for ”

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(1) I pp. 333 and 335.

"Their dress is extremely scanty ; a pair of long blue drawers, and a kind of checkered *plaid*, a part of which is fastened round waist and the other thrown over the shoulder, with a men turban, form their clothing and equipage. The chiefs are distinguished by wearing some heavy gold bracelets on their wrists and sometimes a chain of the same metal bound round their turbans, and by being mounted on better horses ; otherwise no distinction appears amongst them."

This is the picture of men living a plain simple, hardy life

soldier to his own hardihood of character, to that spirit of adaptation which distinguishes every new people, and to that feeling of a common interest and destiny implanted in him by his great teachers." It shows that the Sikhs were a compact band of hardy men, with great adaptability, and bound together *by community of interests and religious traditions*. This very adaptability has enabled the Sikhs, like English men, to roam in different parts of the far-flung British Empire, and even outside and beyond it.

An aged Pathan describes the Sikhs as "truthful and straight-forward."

Sir Lepel Griffin (p.85) pays the Sikhs a magnificent tribute when he says, "There are few stories in Sikh history of outrage to women and tortures to men, such as stain the pages of South Indian History, with cruelty and blood." Sir Lepel Griffin thus corroborates Forster. That the Sikhs were a band of *chaste*, and not ungenerous people, is indeed, magnificent and rare praise for a soldier."

The Sikhs were regular in their ablutions and the performance of *their prayers*, *whereafter* they combed their hair and beard with peculiar *care*. Accustomed from their earliest infancy to a life of hardship and difficulty, the Sikhs despised the comforts of tent. In lieu of this, each horseman was furnished with *two blankets*, one for himself, and the other for his horse. This

throws a side-light on the life of the Sikhs immediately before the rise of M. Ranjit Singh to power

The grandfather of the writer of these lines, was present at the battle of Mudki. He often said, that every Sikh soldier was very particular about carrying with him cakes of soap to wash clothes, a brass pan, and a bit of indigo, wherewith a light blue touch was given to clothes after washing them.

rate, truthful, straight forward man, with religious devotion and healthy optimism.

The reckless daring of the Sikh soldiers was indeed due to their *religious fervour*, and their *heroic religious traditions*. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was sagacious enough to realise this fact and did all he possibly could to deepen and intensify the religious atmosphere which enveloped his soldiers. It would be interesting and instructive to know how he tried to achieve this end.

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham says, "He" (*Maharaja Ranjit Singh*) *was assiduous in his devotions*, he honoured men of reputed sanctity, and enabled them to practise an enlarged charity; he attributed every success to the favour of God, and *he styled himself and people collectively the 'Khalsa'* or Commonwealth of Govind. Whether in walking bare-footed to make his obeisance to a collateral representative of his prophets, or in rewarding a soldier, distinguished by a long and ample beard, or in restraining the excesses of the fanatical Akalis, or in beating an army and acquiring a province, he always made it appear that every thing was done for the sake of the Guru, for the advantage of Khalsa, and in the name of the Lord."

On the seal of the state the words inscribed were Sri Akal Sahai 'God our help' and 'Grace and Victory undoubtedly (or without pause) achieved through the Grace of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.' The *Coins were struck in the name of Nanak and Guru Gobind*

*Singh* and were known as Nanak Shahi or Gobind Shahi (issued under the rule of Nanak and Govind Singh). A beautiful garden, was laid out at Amritsar. The courtiers suggested various names to Christen the garden, and when they had done so, he solemnly said that he would call it '*Ram Bagh*' or the garden of Ram, after the name of Gurm Ram Dass, the founder of Amritsar. He called the Amritsar fort by the name of *Gobind Garh*, after the name of the Tenth Guru.

<sup>1</sup> The Maharaja was very particular about the *daily recital of the Granth in his presence*. He attended the Darbar Sahib (Golden temple) twice a year. 'He bestowed special favours on the Sikh priesthood. While writing or talking about his Government, he invariably used the term '*Khalsa*' and posed as a humble servant of that mystic and militant Church.'

<sup>1</sup> Besides this, every regiment had its own volumes of the *Granth*s and religious insignia. Even the ministers of state carried separate copies of the *Granth*s on their journeys." The Maharaja sometimes decided the despatch of military expeditions by casting lots before the *Adi Granth*.

<sup>2</sup> He put up decent Sikh temples at a large number of places, associated with the memory of the Gurus and attached princely Jagirs to them for charitable purposes. It was he again, who covered the walls of the great Sikh temples at Amritsar, Tarn Taran, and elsewhere with gold plates. A copy of the original Gurmukhi inscription over the door (of the Golden Temple, Amritsar) facing the Clock Tower is given below :—

“ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ  
ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਆਲਸੇ ਜੀ ਕਾ ਸਦਾ ਬੋਲ ਬਾਲਾ ਰਖੇ ॥  
ਸੇਵਾ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਸਰੋਵਰ ਕੀ ਅਰ ਸੰਗ ਸਫੈਦ  
ਕੀ ਵਡਭਾਗੀ ਜਾਣਕੇ ਸ੍ਰੀਮਹਾਰਾਜਾ ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੇਂ ਕਰਾਈ

It might be rendered into English thus :—

<sup>4</sup> “God prosper the Khalsa (The Commonwealth); through the grace of the Guru, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was able to render the service of gold and white marble

(1) Captain Wade's Letters p. 337 of the Punjab as a Sovereign State, footnote p. 204. footnotes pp. 205-6.

(2) B. Prem Singh's 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh' p. 428.

(3) Also see B. Prem Singh's 'Maharajah Ranjit Singh' p. 45

(4) B. Prem Singh's 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh, p. 425.



to the Temple." It might be pointed out that the Temple managers had originally, put up an inscription in a different style. It was like this, "*All this (gold and marble work) is the gift of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.*" The Maharaja disapproved of it, and pointed out that he was nobody to gift it away. It was the Gurn who had blessed him by enabling him to render the humble service. *"The agreement entered into by Generals Ventura, Allard, and other European officers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army bound them"* to domesticate themselves in the country by marriage, not to eat beef, not to smoke tobacco in public, to permit their beards to grow, to take care not to offend against Sikh religion, and if required, to fight against their own country "

Singh's imperialism had destroyed the democratic spirit, there were some signs of the old discernment still visible. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh, inspite of remonstrances from his community, still continued indulging in certain evils, he found his corrector in one of his own devoted captains. As he was pacing in the precincts of the Golden Temple, he was held up by Baba Phula Singh, who severely rebuked him in the presence of all, and said that he was unfit to be the leader of the Khalsa, until he had mended his ways. He at once confessed up his guilt, and submitted that he was ready to pay any fine that a Commission of Five might impose upon him. *Phula Singh* said that fine was no punishment for him; he should be flogged in public. The Maharaja at once *bared his back and offered himself for being flogged*. Tears came into the eyes of spectators. Flogging was abandoned, and a fine was accepted. This could not but create a feeling of profound respect for the Maharaja's submission to the dictates of the Panth."

Instances could be multiplied to demonstrate the truth of Cunningham's remarks referred to above. It appeared to the Sikhs that the Maharaja did every thing for the Guru. The Guru was the Maharaja's as well as, their own Guru, and when the Maharaja bade the army to proceed on this or that expedition, their conviction was that they were out to fight the battles of the Guru. Fighting at the Maharaja's bidding meant fighting for the Guru's cause. The effect may well be imagined. Indeed, this was the spirit which permeated

the Sikh Soldier, when he stood in martial array against the British forces. The Sikhs ardently felt that they were fighting the Guru's war, and they fought valiantly and well.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SIKH SOLDIER

#### In Success and Defeat

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The Sikhs in their religious congregations, chant with great fervour and zeal the couplet :—

‘Sura so pahchaniye jo lare din ke het,

Purza purza kat mare, kabhun na chhade khet’,

“The hero is he, who fights for the oppressed and depressed and the lowly (others might possibly interpret ‘din’ as religion) is hacked into pieces, yet does not flee from the field of battle.” This has been the ideal of a Sikh Soldier from the time of Guru Har Gobind upto this day. After a long siege in the fort of *Anandpur*, the Sikh soldiers feeling sick and exhausted renounced or disclaimed the Guru (Guru Gobind Singh), wrote a disclaimer to that effect and went back home. But what a home ! Their wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, would not deign to look at the faces of the deserters : they despised them ; they were ridiculed, despised, detested. The ‘deserters’ went back, participated in the Guru’s fight at Muktsar, and died fighting. As the Guru went looking after the dead, and the dying, Mahan Singh, one of the *deserters* who was in the last agony of death, besought the Guru to tear off the disclaimer, and to forget and forgive the whole episode. Thus was the sin of desertion washed off with the blood of the repentants. The recital of this incident serves as a lesson and a

warning to Sikhs. Others might bend, but the martial spirit and heroic traditions of the Khalsa would not permit the Sikh soldier to bend. He might break rather than bend. We shall presently see the working of this spirit in the first and second Sikh Wars.

In defeat, in adversity, in trial and tribulation, in a period of stress and strain, the Sikh Soldier has behaved nobly, gloriously, superbly. Not to go far back, take the episode of *Sarangarhi*. The heroic band of Sikh Soldiers died to a man at their posts, covering themselves with imperishable glory.

He bore it all patiently.

Later on, when the Sikhs were outlawed by Farukh Siyar, and were ruthlessly persecuted by 'Mir Mannu,' they fled to jungles and deserts, and then forming bands or confederacies, by their incessant raids, broke into atoms the power of their rulers. But whenever, they were not fighting against their common foe, they started fighting amongst themselves. That was how they used their periods of success and triumph. Like the Bourbons they learnt nothing and forgot nothing.

Again, in 1761-62, Ahmad Shah Abdali, on hearing that the Sikhs had attacked the troops he had left in garrison at Sarhand, came back post-haste and totally defeated the Sikhs. *Some 20,000 Sikhs were killed and captured.* Did this disaster break their spirit? 'The Sikhs were not cast down by their defeat', says Bingley, 'and no sooner had Ahmad Shah returned to Kabul, than the confederacies both North and South of the Sutlej, for once laid aside their feuds and jealousies and united for another great effort against Sarhand, a city which to them was peculiarly obnoxious. Zin Khan, the Afghan Governor of the town was defeated and killed and his troops utterly routed. But what happened next? The Sikhs immediately, took possession of the city, which they plundered and destroyed. In the hour of defeat, they were not cast down, and when Victory came they behaved ungenerously.'

Sir Lepel Griffin pays the Sikh Soldiers a gushing tribute of praise when he says,

"I had many opportunities of observing the conduct of the Sikh troops during the later portion of the campaign in Afghanistan, and no praise could be too high for their patience under privation and their admirable and orderly behaviour towards the Afghans, who, it must be remembered, were their bitter and ancient enemies. Again, he says," The Sikh is always the same in peace, in war, in barracks or in the field, ever genial, good tempered and uncomplaining; a fair horseman, a stubborn infantry soldier, as steady under fire as he is eager for a charge." It would indeed be a magnificent thing, if an individual or a nation, were perfect and faultless. But in this world of ours, there is light, as well as, shade.

us see how they behaved in their hour of trial and tribulation.

<sup>1</sup> "The chiefs of the Punjab, jealous of one another and fearing the power of the army, urged hostilities with the British in hopes of bringing about the fall of the martial power of the Khalsa and the consequent, or at least subsequent establishment of their own position and authority. The chiefs Lal Singh and Tej Singh urged them to war. The army under Tej Singh, Commander-in-chief of the Sikh army, and Lal Singh, crossed the Sutlej, between Hari-ka-Pattan and Kasur, and war was declared. Gough and Innes say : "It became, therefore, the policy of the Court, which felt itself powerless in the hands of the Panchayats, to devise means of destroying or else satisfying the army itself..... The Khalsa was to be urged to challenge the British. If it were shattered, the Court would be rid of its masters ; if triumphant, the Court would claim the credit." Again, "Gholab Singh sent a <sup>2</sup> & <sup>3</sup> messenger" (to the British) "affirming positively that the Sikhs were determined on war, and offering to throw in his lot with the British."

Cunningham is still more relentless in his statement on the subject. He says:

<sup>4</sup> "The object of Lal Singh and Tej Singh was to get their own troops dispersed by the converging forces of their own opponents. Their desire was to be upheld

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(1) Burton's 'The First and Second Sikhs Wars'. p. 10-54.

(2) Gough and Innes's 'The Sikhs and Sikh War'. p. 57.

(3) Gough and Innes's 'The Sikhs and Sikh War'. p. 60-61.

(4) Cunningham's 'History of the Sikhs'. p. 291



as the Ministers of a dependent Kingdom by grateful conquerors. They assured the local British authorities of their secret and efficient good will. They kept up an appearance of devotion to the interests of their own country." To give a finishing touch to his indictment, he calls the General as <sup>1</sup> "studiously treacherous" towards their followers.

Cunningham is unsparing in his attack on these two men, and adds that Lal Singh was understood to have sent a plan of the Sikh position at Sahraon to Col. Lawrence; while at Multki, Lal Singh headed the attack, but in accordance with his original design, <sup>2</sup> involved his followers in an engagement, and then left them to fight as their undirected valour might prompt them.

Cunningham describing the battle of Feroz-Shahr, further says:—

time when the artillery ammunition of the English had failed, when a portion of their force was retiring upon Ferozepur and when no exertion could have prevented the remainder from retreating likewise, if the Sikhs had boldly pressed forward.” -

One more quotation from Cunningham would suffice to show clearly the mentality of the leaders of the Sikh army in the First Sikh War. <sup>1</sup> “The traitor Tej Singh,” he says, “indeed, instead of leading fresh men to sustain the failing strength of troops on his right, fled on the first, and either accidentally or by design, *sank a-boat in the middle of the bridge of communication.*” The object of Tej Singh, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh army was, as has been shown above, the destruction of his own army, so that his own position might subsequently be made safe and unassailable.

It would indeed, be a miracle, if an army, in spite of such unworthy leaders, could still fight heroically and magnificently. Let us see what their chivalrous foes have to say of the bravery of the Sikh soldiers in their hour of trial and tribulation, that is in the First and Second Sikh Wars, when they had to fight against the British army.

“The Sikh soldiers, says Burton (p. 3 ) did everything, the leaders nothing.” <sup>2</sup> “Every Sikh considered the cause as his own, and he would work as a labourer, as well as, carry a musket; he would drag guns, drive

(1) Cunningham's History of the Sikhs. p. 314.

(2) Cunningham's History of the Sikhs. p. 292.

as the Ministers :

conquerors. The camels, and load and unload boats with of their serene alacrity." Gough and Innes ('The Sikhs and Anglo-Sikh Wars' p. 130) say, "In every case, indeed, we had foemen worthy of our steel: disciplined troops, fighting behind entrenchments, with dogged resolution, well armed, well supplied with artillery, and superior in numbers to our own."

<sup>1</sup> 'The Sikh soldiery fought with a discipline and stubbornness unequalled in our experience of native warfare.' Again, they say "The Sikh infantry and guns stood resolutely, fighting well and with great determination."

'Their gallantry and discipline in the fight evoked the admiration of their enemies.' <sup>2</sup> The soldiery were the most stubborn we ever fought in India. Their guns were heavier and more numerous than ours, and were admirably served.'

the contest, threw the English into confusion ; men of all regiments and arms were mixed together ; Generals were doubtful of the extent of their own success, and colonels knew not what had become of the regiments they commanded, or of the army of which they formed a part."

<sup>1</sup> *At Sabraon*, the Sikhs did not run but fought to the last with their swords, until pressed by the Victors on every side, slowly and with heavy loss, they were driven back to the river and precipitated in masses over the bank and over the bridge, where many were drowned in the waters of the Sutlej which a sudden rise of seven inches had rendered scarcely fordable. In their efforts to reach the other bank through the stream, they suffered terribly from the fire of the horse artillery. Gough wrote in his despatch, "*Hundreds upon hundreds were drowned in attempting this perilous passage.* The awful slaughter, confusion and dismay were such as would have excited compassion in the hearts of their generous conquerors, if the Khalsa troops had not in the earlier part of the action, sullied their gallantry by slaughtering and barbarously mangling every wounded soldier whom in the vicissitudes of attack, the fortune of war left at their mercy. "Surely, the Sikhs, instead of seeking almost certain death in the swollen and tempestuous river could have easily saved their lives by surrender. But the Sikh Soldier would not bend. He preferred to break.

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(1) Burton's 'The First and Second Sikh Wars (Sobraon) p. 41. .

(At Sobraon) <sup>1</sup> "Although assailed on either side by squadrons of horse and battalions of foot, no Sikh offered to submit and no disciple of Gobind asked for quarter. The victors looked with stolid wonderment upon the indomitable courage of the vanquished, and forbore to strike where the helpless and the dying frowned unavailing hatred."

<sup>2</sup> No Sikh offered to submit, no disciple of Gobind asked for quarter. Every where they showed a bold front to the victors, whilst many rushed singly forth to meet assured death. Griffin pays a ungrateful tribute to S. Sham Singh of Atari, when he says, (p. 67), "S. Sham Singh had denounced the war with the English, and well foresaw what its termination must be. But he resolved to fight for the Khalsa, and

that my country's good required the sacrifice, I could have wept to have witnessed the fearful slaughter of so devoted a body." Gough and Innes further say,<sup>1</sup> "It was indeed, fortunate for us that the leaders were not worthy of the men, that Tej Singh was saint-hearted, and Lal Singh incompetent and only half trusted. "None but a great and chivalrous English General could have paid a tribute like this.

Like his English comrade-in-arms, the Sikh Soldier does not know when he is defeated. The second Sikh war was due to the feeling among the Sikhs that the Khalsa had not been fairly beaten, and that he must try another chance. *The feeling of invincibility given by Guru Gobind Singh did not allow him to bend easily.* The battle of Gujrat ultimately brought home to him the stern fact of defeat. But he did not yield easily. Let us see how he behaved in the Second war.

<sup>2</sup>At Chillianwala, the Sikhs sword in hand, charged more than once, and tried to break through the British line, which had to turn in different directions to resist attack, but they were at length driven from his part of the field.

<sup>3</sup>If a victory at all, it was a *Pyrrhic one*. for the victors had probably lost more than the vanquished and could not even hold the ground on which they stood, or the guns which they had taken. Burton adds, "Thus ended one of the hardest fought battles

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(1) Gough and Innes p.138.

(2) Burton's 'The First and Second Wars' p.103.

(3) Burton's 'The First and Second Wars' p.103.

ever contested on Indian soil" (Chillianwala).

General Thackwell, in his "Narrative of the Second Sikh War," says,

'In this action' (Gujrat) 'as well as at Chillianwala the Seikhs' (Sikhs) 'caught hold of the bayonets of their assailants with the r left hands, and closing with their adversary dealt furious sword-blows with their right. This circumstance alone will suffice to demonstrate the rare species of courage possessed by these men. It may be doubted by many that one Sikh foot-soldier repulsed three lancers at Chillianwala, but such has been stated to be a fact. He received the thrust of the lance on his shield and rushing under it cut at the lancer or shivered the lance into atoms with his "Talwar".'

such magnificent tributes of praise. The Sikh army fought valiantly and well, their worthless leaders notwithstanding. During their brief spell of power, preceding the first Sikh War, the Sikh army had made and unmade their kings, and were overbearing, haughty and unruly. The Court was at their mercy, and they indeed, shed blood recklessly. Power inebriated them, and they acted thoughtlessly. But in the hour of their trial and tribulation, when they stood in battle array against the victors of Napoleon, with their vast empire and their limitless resources, the Sikh soldiery behaved superbly. They honestly felt that they were fighting their Guru's battles. They were imbued with religious ardour. Mere ardour and enthusiasm however would have little availed them, had it not been accompanied by the rigid military discipline, through which Maharaja Ranjit Singh had put them. The Sikh Wars proved to be the touchstone, on which the efficiency of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's war machine was tested. It was tested and weighed, and was not found quite wanting.

That the Sikhs fought and fought magnificently, so that their victors could praise them in terms of hyperbole, was no small thing. Their defeat was glorious enough, covering them with imperishable glory and everlasting renown.

The Sikh army fought manfully and heroically. We have yet to see whether their behaviour towards their foes, on the field of battle, and in the brief intervals





Again we come across another instance of a similar nature. 'An officer *Lt. Biddulph*, on his way to join his regiment at Ferozepore, fell into their (Sikhs) hands and although his life was in peril, it was spared, and he was made over to the charge of an officer of Sikh artillery; the gunners became his friends; and strange to say, *after the battle of Moodkee, he was allowed to return to the British Camp*, whither, he was escorted by the artillery officer's brother. Sir Henry Hardinge very rightly would not allow *Lt. Biddulph* to take part in the subsequent battle at Feroz Shah; remarking that he owed that at least to the generous enemy who had released him."

Thackwell in the course of his description of the battle of Chillianwala says:—

"The English officers—*Major Lawrence, Lieutenants Herbert and Bowie* who had been taken prisoners whilst occupying the forts of Attock and Peshawar, accompanied <sup>1</sup> Chutter," (*Chutter Singh*, Sher Singh's father); "they were *treated with consideration by the Sikh chieftains*. A strong guard was posted at their quarters to prevent the Akalee fanatics from despatching them. They received permission to come into the British Camp for a few days on parole."

<sup>2</sup> Another instance. "On the 18th Sher Singh sent back to the British Camp two men belonging to the 19th Lancers, who had been caught straying in the

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(1) Gough and Innes *The Sikhs and Sikh Wars*. p.79

(2) Gough and Innes p. 241.

jungle and taken captive. And Chatter Singh not only allowed George Lawrence to go to Lahore on parole, but likewise permitted Lt. Bowie- who had been taken in the Derajat and was now a prisoner within the lines of Rassool-to visit Lord Gough's Camp on parole. The remarkable fact is that the Sikh chiefs not only know that they might be trusted but were generous enough to give them the benefit of that confidence."

rather sornbre and gloomy. The <sup>1</sup> writer of the "Leaves from the Journal of a Subaltern," speaks of two men of the 10th Queen's, who were taken prisoners by the Sikhs and hung up. The writer bitterly records," These r.....Sikhs took two prisoners of the 10th Queen's and hung them up before our pickets, who were too weak to attempt any rescue. Young Lhoyd also, a poor ensign, who advanced before his party, was treacherously set on and cut to pieces;" In the rear, where we had been obliged to leave them in the charge" (at Chillianwalla) Gough and Innes also, while gratefully recording examples of Sikh chivalry, have <sup>2</sup> not omitted to speak of the unmanly, ungenerous and merciless conduct of many of them.

It is pleasanter however, to think of the Sikh Soldier at his best. One might cry with the poet, "Sikh Soldier, with all thy faults I love thee still". The Sikh Soldier is full of light and shade, but the light appears gloriously bright, even though the shade flits across streaks of light, every now and then.

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(1) "Leaves from the Jornal of a Subaltern." p. 3.

(2) Gough and Innes p. 79.

## CHAPTER VI

### Defeat and Disbandment in 1849

At the close of the First Sikh War, the Sikhs believed that they were not fairly beaten. For the second time, they had crossed swords with the British army. The arbitrament of war was over-wholly in their favour at Gujrat, where the retreat of the Sikh army became a flight.<sup>1</sup> They dispersed in every direction, throwing away their arms, and the track of the fugitive was marked by dead, wounded, and articles of equipment. Sir Walter Gilbert pursued them. On 10th March, 1849, General Gilbert was at Munkhli, where Sardar Kahan Singh Mogaitha, with 1,000 armed retainers and some gunpowder, rendered him submission. On the 12th Sardar Chatter Singh, Sardar Sher Singh and other leaders and officers of the Sikh army were ordered to assemble at 17 miles<sup>2</sup> of Hurdiana, and on the 14th, to accept of the terms of the surrender of the rest of the Sikh army.<sup>3</sup> It was to be

The tope, standing solemn and serene, in that vast expanse, had seen, time and again, streams of invaders pass by it, to and fro. "Sceptre and crown, must tumble down," it seemed to say. Or perhaps, the voice of Buddha whispered, "The Sikh Soldier must throw down his sword, for henceforth peace would reign supreme in the land of Ind."

<sup>1</sup> "The work of disarming which commenced at Mankiala, was completed at Rawa'pindi; the Seikh chieftains delivering their swords into the hands of Sir Walter (Gilbert). Sardars Chattar Singh and Sher Singh were among the first to propose surrender. All the other chiefs came in with the exception of Bhai Maharaja Singh and Col. Riehpaul Singh. Forty one pieces of artillery were also brought in and sixteen thousand men laid down their arms. The reluctance of some of the old Khalsa veterans to surrender their arms was evident. Some could not restrain their tears; while on the faces of others, rage and hatred were visibly depicted. They each received a present of one rupee from the Company Bahaudar. Many officers were anxious to obtain possession of some of the weapons here taken; but neither their entreaties, nor offers of money, had any effect on the British authorities."

Describing the disbandment, the author of <sup>2</sup> "Leaves from the Journal of a Subaltern" records :—

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- (1). Thackvell's 'Narrative of the 2nd Sikh War, p. 237.
  - (2). Leaves from the Journal of a Subaltern. p. p. 189-190.

" They marched in bodies of 200 ; and each man as he passed, threw his arms on a heap, in front of the General's tent . . . I never saw any thing like the reluctance with which they seemed to part with their weapons. Many of them were fine gray-haired old fellows, with large flowing white beards, probably some of Ranjit Singh's veterans. One old fellow I noticed in particular : he stood for a long time looking wistfully at his arms and the pile before him, and evidently could not make up his mind to give them up. At last the officer on duty touched him on the shoulder and ordered him to move on ; he threw down his sword and matchlock, with a sigh and turned away, saying with tears in his eyes, " All my work is done now." General Gough, speaking of the disbandment of the Sikh army says : -

Sergeant on duty, advance to the party, present arms and demand their weapons. The look of anger with which some of the Bunnoo infantry, who formed the escort of their beloved chief, complied with this request, will never be effaced from my imagination. Some of them muttered an invocation or prayer as they grasped their beloved musket for the last time." One of those who had surrendered at Mankialn, said to the writer of these lines that what they said on laying down arms was, "Guru, Thou Thyself gavest us the sword, and Thou hast now snatched it away. When it pleases Thee, Thou wilt give it back again." And it did please the Guru to give it back to the Khalsa. He joined the British army soon after, and since the days of the Mutiny the Sikh Soldier's record has been one of a long series of triumphs, and the world has repeatedly resounded with the praises of his manliness; hardihood, and heroism.

I might once more quote Gough and Innes : "They stood up against cold steel as stubbornly as a European foe would have done, standing their ground, and selling their lives dearly." Again, "In the hour of surrender as in the hour of battle they proved themselves a worthy foe."

Religious fervour produced Sikh Soldiers and religious fervour alone can maintain their soldierly qualities.

Gordon ('The Sikhs' p.228.) speaks of the 'Stern

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(1) Gough and Innes, p p.249,255





‘There’s not to reason why,  
There’s but to do and die.’

Or he would passionately sing in his Sikh congregations his native war-song.

‘Sura so pahehaniye jo lare din ke het,  
Purza purza kat mare, kabhun na chhode khet.’

For him, the Guru ever lives and loves, and watches over him, lest his brave disciple should desert the battlefield, and besmirch the fair name of the Khalsa or the baptism of the dagger or ‘Pahul’ which the Tenth Guru had initiated, and which is still potent enough to conjure up visions and traditions of romantic chivalry and heroism, enabling him to win imperishable renown at Saragarhi and elsewhere. The Victoria Cross comes to him several times over, and surprises none, for heroism and a Sikh Soldier are synonyms. The Sikh soldier is the creation of the Sikh Gurus, and will continue to live and thrive, so long as the Word of the Gurus is read, heard and understood.



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